

Weight Management -- Strategies for Success

One in every three Americans is fighting the weight loss battle. Tipping the energy balance scale in favor of using more calories than you consume is the bottom line for losing weight. Sounds easy! Then why are so many people losing the weight loss battle instead of the weight? Whether you have tried to lose weight on your own or with the help of an organized program, the focus is too often on severely restrictive diets and unrealistic goals. Not being able to reach these goals can set you up for an endless cycle of failure and discouragement. Also, extremely limited food choices may trigger binge eating, which can undermine your efforts.

Increase your chances for success by focusing on *managing your weight*. Weight management involves adopting a lifestyle that includes a healthful eating plan and regular physical activity. The key to managing weight throughout life is a positive attitude and the right kind of motivation. Internal motivators such as health, increased energy, self-esteem, and personal control increase your chances for lifelong weight management success. Your physician can help determine the appropriate type of weight management plan for you. A registered dietitian can tailor a plan to meet your individual needs and show you how to follow these strategies for long-term success.

Strategy 1: Make health, not appearance, your weight management priority. A realistic goal is to achieve a healthy weight, not necessarily the lowest weight you can reach or an "ideal" weight from a chart.

Strategy 2: Focus on a healthy eating style, not on "dieting." Dieting usually lasts for only the short term and rarely produces long-term success.

Strategy 3: Eating for good health and eating to control weight are virtually the same. Choosing a healthful eating plan that includes a variety of food choices from the Food Guide Pyramid can accomplish both objectives. All foods can fit into a nutritious, reduced-calorie eating plan, rich in foods with complex carbohydrates and fiber, like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, and low in fat. You can feel full and satisfied with the suggested number of servings from each food group: 6 to 11 servings of bread, cereal, rice, or pasta, 2 to 3 servings of fruits, 3 to 5 servings of vegetables, 2 to 3 servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese, and 5 to 7 ounces of lean meat, poultry, fish, or meat alternatives such as dried beans, eggs, peanut butter, or nuts. The number of servings you need depends on your age, gender, activity level, and weight loss goals. Usually for weight management you should choose serving amounts from the lower end of the range for each food group.

Strategy 4: People who keep physically active are more successful at losing and keeping off extra pounds. A physically active lifestyle offers many rewards in addition to weight management, such as heart health, strong bones, and stress relief. For weight management, experts recommend a combined total of 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days. Smaller amounts are OK, but try to accumulate at least 30 minutes a day. If you haven't been physically active, build up the time gradually. Focus on increasing daily physical activity, rather than setting unrealistic "exercise" goals. Pick an activity that you enjoy and are likely to continue, such as a brisk walk in the morning or a swim after work. Before beginning any exercise program, however, be sure to consult your physician.

Strategy 5: Prescription medication may be part of a weight management program for obese patients that also includes nutrition counseling from a registered dietitian and regular physical activity. Prescription medications for weight loss generally reduce appetite, making it easier to control food intake. Talk with your physician to learn about possible side effects and to determine if prescription medications should be part of your weight management program.

Putting It All Together

To make sure your weight management plan is safe and effective, ask yourself a few questions before you begin. Does your plan

- include a variety of foods from all five major groups in the Food Guide Pyramid?
- include appealing foods you will enjoy eating for the rest of your life, not just a few weeks or months?
- include foods available at the supermarket where you usually shop?
- allow you to eat your favorite foods in moderation?
- recommend changes in your eating habits that also fit your lifestyle and budget?
- include at least the minimum number of servings from the Food Guide Pyramid?
- include regular physical activity?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, chances are your weight-loss program will allow you to achieve long-term success.

For more information

- Contact your local **Health and Wellness Center** or **Dietitian**.
- **The American Dietetic Association/National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics.** For food and nutrition information and a [referral to a registered dietitian](#) in your area, call the Consumer Nutrition Hot Line at 800/366-1655.

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